

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims**

1.-25. (Cancelled)

26. (New) A ready-to-use, water-dispersible pigment composition, comprising (A) at least 5% by weight of water, (B) a hydrocolloid, (C) and a water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment that is in the form of bodies having an average size that no greater than 10  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein said composition is substantially free of surface active substances.

27. (New) A composition according to claim 26, wherein said water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment is a pigment that is generally insoluble in aqueous media at about neutral pH or below but is soluble in aqueous media at pH values in the alkaline range.

28. (New) A composition according to claim 27, wherein said water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment is selected from the group consisting of a porphyrin pigment, carmine, curcumin and a carotenoid.

29. (New) A composition according to claim 28, wherein said water-insoluble hydrophilic natural pigment is in the form of particles obtained by precipitation of the pigment caused by acidifying an alkaline solution of the pigment.

30. (New) A composition according to claim 26, wherein said hydrocolloid is selected from the group consisting of a protein, a polysaccharide and a gum.

31. (New) A composition according to claim 26 wherein the composition has a pH which is at the most 7.

32. (New) A ready-to-use, water-dispersible composition that comprises a dispersion of a hydrophilic natural pigment in a hydrocolloid that contains an aqueous phase, wherein (i) said pigment is in the form of bodies having an average size of no more than 10  $\mu\text{m}$  and (ii) said composition is substantially free of surface active substances

33. (New) A composition according to claim 32, wherein said composition contains at least 5% by weight of water.

34. (New) A composition according to claim 32 wherein said composition is a pharmaceutical product.

35. (New) A composition according to claim 32 wherein said composition is an edible food product.

36. (New) An edible product comprising a composition according to claim 26.

37. (New) A pharmaceutical product comprising a composition according to claim 26.

38. (New) An edible product according to claim 36, wherein said edible product comprises a plurality of separated compartments, said composition being dispersed in at least one of said compartments, and wherein said composition does not migrate to another of said compartments.

39. (New) A pharmaceutical product according to claim 37, wherein said pharmaceutical product comprises a plurality of separated compartments, said composition being dispersed in at least one of said compartments, and wherein said composition does not migrate to another of said compartments.

40. (New) A method of preparing a ready-to-use, water-dispersible pigment composition according to claim 26, said method comprising preparing a dispersion of a water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment by mixing said water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment, in the absence of a surface active substance, into a hydrocolloid containing aqueous phase to obtain a dispersion comprising the pigment in the form of bodies having an average size of at the most 10  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein the composition containing at least 5% by weight water.

41. (New) A method according to claim 40, which further comprises drying the dispersion to obtain a composition containing less than 5% by weight of water, subject to the proviso that, when said pigment is carmine or is spray-dried norbixin, then the hydrocolloid is not gelatin.

42. (New) A method according to claim 40, wherein said water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment is in the form of particles obtained by precipitation of the pigment caused by acidifying an alkaline solution of the pigment.

43. (New) A method according to claim 40, wherein the hydrocolloid is present in an amount of less than about 10% by weight calculated on the pigment.

44. (New) A method according to claim 40, further comprising adding a carbohydrate to said aqueous phase.

45. (New) A method of preparing a ready-to-use, water dispersible pigment composition, said method comprising the steps of:

- i) preparing an alkaline aqueous solution comprising a water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment,
- ii) preparing an aqueous composition of a hydrocolloid, and
- iii) mixing the alkaline aqueous solution with the aqueous hydrocolloid composition to obtain the composition comprising the pigment in the form of a dispersion of pigment bodies having an average size of at the most 10  $\mu\text{m}$ , the composition containing at least 5% by weight water.

46. A method according to claim 45, further comprising adjusting the pH to a level which causes the pigment to precipitate.

47. (New) A method according to claim 45, further comprising drying the composition of pigment bodies to obtain a composition containing less than 5% by weight of water, subject to the proviso that, when the pigment is carmine or spray-dried norbixin, then the hydrocolloid is not gelatin.

48. (New) A method according to claim 45, wherein the aqueous solution of step i) and/or the hydrocolloid composition of step ii) further comprises a carbohydrate.

49. (New) A method of preparing a ready-to-use, water-dispersible pigment composition comprising:

- i) preparing an alkaline aqueous solution comprising a water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment,
- ii) decreasing the pH to precipitate said water-insoluble, hydrophilic natural pigment, resulting in a dispersion of precipitated pigment,
- iii) preparing an aqueous dispersion or solution of a hydrocolloid,
- iv) mixing the dispersion comprising the precipitated pigment of step i) and the hydrocolloid containing dispersion or solution of step ii),

to obtain the composition comprising the pigment in the form of a dispersion of pigment bodies having an average size of at the most 10  $\mu\text{m}$ , wherein the composition containing at least 5% by weight water.

50. (New) A method according to claim 49, further comprising drying the composition of pigment bodies to obtain a composition containing less than 5% by weight of water, subject to the limitation that, when the pigment is carmine or spray-dried norbixin, the hydrocolloid is not gelatin.

51. (New) A method according to claim 49, wherein the dispersion comprising the precipitated pigment of step i) and the dispersion or solution of step ii) further comprises a carbohydrate.